

FOR RELEASE MAY 3, 2017

Public Trust in Government Remains Near Historic Lows as Partisan Attitudes Shift

Democrats' confidence in country's future declines sharply

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Carroll Doherty, Director of Political Research
Jocelyn Kiley, Associate Director, Research
Bridget Johnson, Communications Associate

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. The Center studies U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

© Pew Research Center 2017

Public Trust in Government Remains Near Historic Lows as Partisan Attitudes Shift

Democrats' confidence in country's future declines sharply

The 2016 election ushered in a new era in Washington defined by unified Republican control of the White House and both chambers of Congress. The changes in the dynamics of power in Washington have registered with members of both political parties. Somewhat more Republicans express trust in government today than did so prior to the election, while views among Democrats have moved in the opposite direction.

For the first time since George W. Bush's presidency, Republicans (28%) are more likely than Democrats (15%) to say they can trust the government in Washington to do the right thing just about always or most of the time.

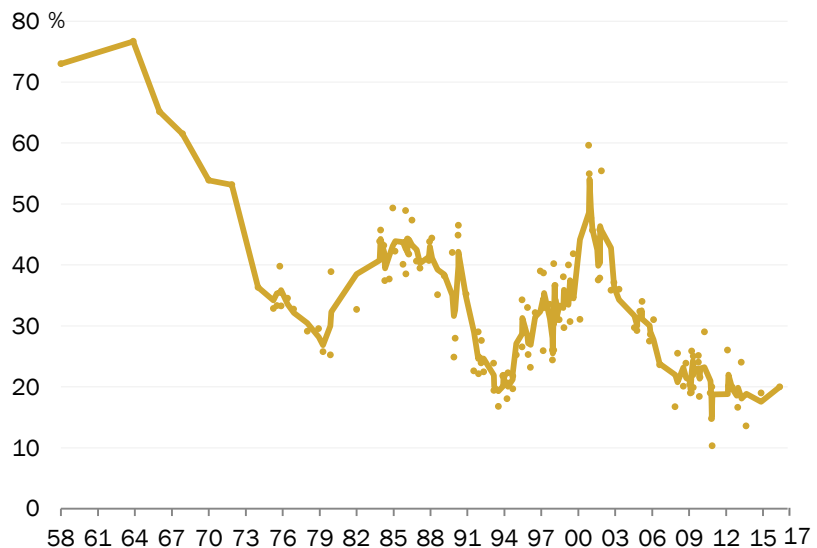
The share of Democrats expressing trust in government is among the lowest levels for members of the party dating back nearly six decades.

The national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted April 5-11 among 1,501 adults, finds that the overall level of trust in government

remains near historic lows; just 20% say they trust the government to do what's right always or most of the time. Far more say they trust the government only some of the time (68%); 11% volunteer that they never trust the government to do what's right.

Public trust in government remains near historic lows

Trust the federal government to do what is right just about always/most of the time...



Notes: From 1976-2016 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

Trend sources: Pew Research Center, National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As was the case prior to last fall's election, the public's feelings about government tend more toward frustration than anger. Most Americans (55%) continue to say they are frustrated with the federal government, while relatively few say they are either angry (22%) or basically content (19%). On both measures of trust in government and emotional reactions to government, improving views among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents have been offset by more negative views among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, resulting in overall assessments that are little different than in previous years.

There also has been a substantial change in partisan attitudes regarding the country's future. Overall, 41% of Americans say they have "quite a lot" of confidence in the future of the U.S., while 30% have some confidence. About a quarter (28%) say they have little or no confidence in the country's future, up from just 15% in the fall of 2015.

Since then, the share of Republicans expressing quite a lot of confidence in the nation's future has increased 19 percentage points (from 40% to 59%), while falling 22 points among Democrats (50% to 28%).

Public trust in government: 1958-2017

As has been the case for the last decade, public trust in government remains near historically low levels. Just two-in-ten Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (4%) or “most of the time” (16%). Nearly seven-in-ten (68%) say they trust the government to do what’s right only some of the time and 11% volunteer the response that they never trust the government.

Public trust in government is little different that it was before the 2016 election. In October 2015, 19% said they felt they could trust the government in Washington to do what’s right always (3%) or most of the time (16%).

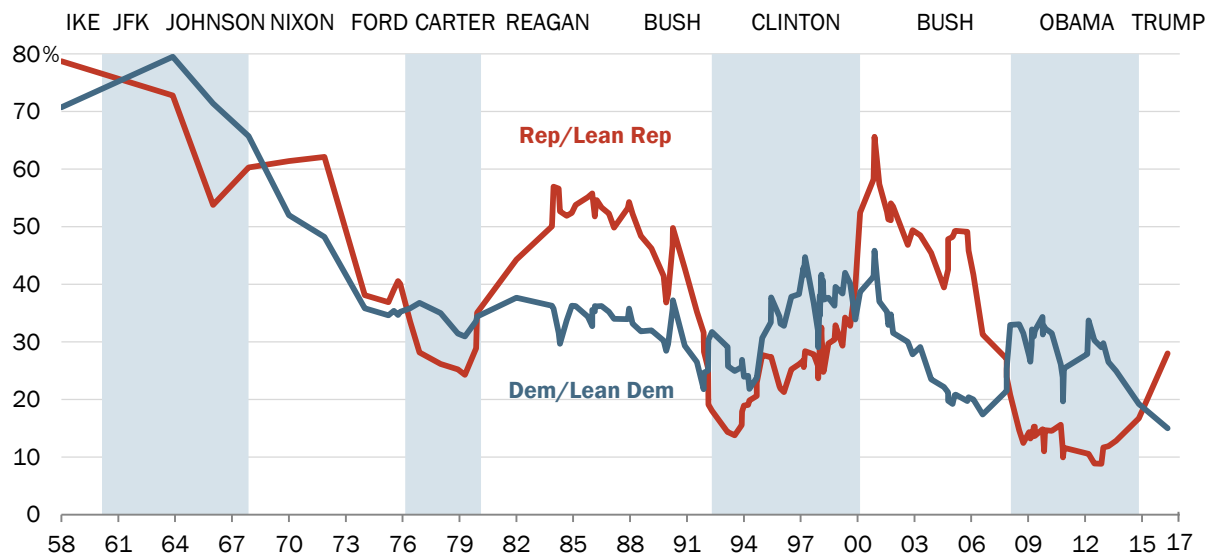
No more than about 30% have expressed trust in the government in Washington to do the right thing at any point over the last decade. This marks the longest period of low trust in government since the question was first asked in 1958.

Trust in government has typically been higher among those associated with the party in control of the White House than among those who support the opposing party. This is true today as Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are now more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to say they trust the federal government to do what is right always or most of the time (28% vs. 15%, respectively).

Trust in government among Republicans has increased 17 points since October 2015. The current share of Republicans who say they trust the government at least most of the time (28%) is considerably higher than throughout much of the Obama administration and is on par with the share of Republicans who said this in 2007 and 2008. Still, GOP trust in government today remains significantly lower than it was throughout most of George W. Bush's administration.

Trust in government climbs among Republicans, falls among Democrats

Trust the federal government to do what is right just about always/most of the time...



Notes: From 1976-2016 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

Trend sources: Pew Research Center, National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

While Republicans' trust in government has increased substantially over the last several months, Democratic trust in government is now as low as it has ever been in 60 years. Just 15% of Democrats say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right always or most of the time, a decrease of 11 percentage points since fall 2015. (See the accompanying [interactive](#) for

long-term trends on public trust in government, including among partisan and demographic groups).

Few say they are content with the federal government

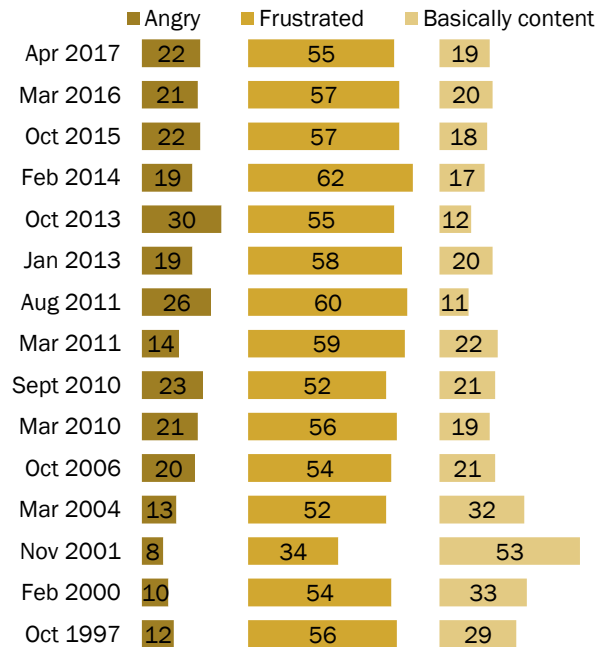
The public continues to express frustration with the federal government, rather than anger or contentment. A majority of Americans say frustration (55%) best describes their feeling toward the federal government, while about two-in-ten say they are angry (22%); a similar share (19%) say they are basically content.

Overall, attitudes toward the federal government today are virtually identical to a year ago. In March 2016, 57% said they felt frustrated with the federal government, while 21% said they were angry and 20% said they were basically content.

The current level of anger toward the federal government is about the same as it has been over the last few years and lower than it was in October 2013, during the 16-day government shutdown. At that time, 30% said they were angry at the government.

Frustration remains dominant public feeling toward federal government

Feeling toward the federal government (%)



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

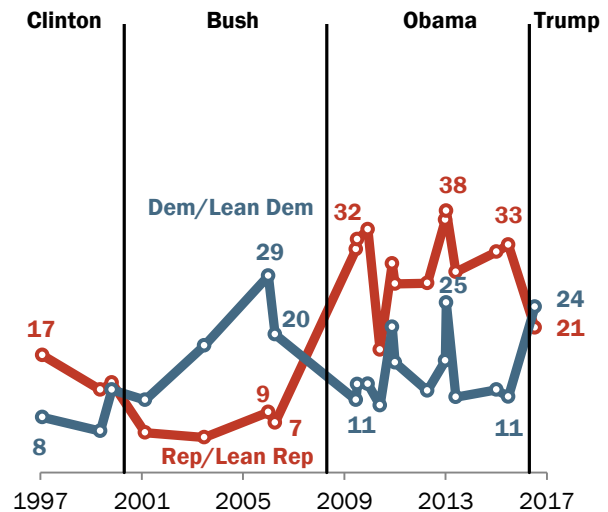
Today, Republicans (21%) and Democrats (24%) are about equally likely to express anger about the federal government. This reflects substantial shifts within both parties over the last year: Levels of anger toward the federal government have fallen sharply among Republicans, while levels among Democrats are up significantly.

Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents the share feeling angry toward the federal government is down 12 percentage points from March 2016 (from 33% to 21%). The last time anger toward government was about this low among Republicans was in March 2011 (18%), shortly after Republicans regained control of Congress following victories in the 2010 midterm elections. Still, Republicans are more likely to express anger at government today than they were during the Bush administration.

By contrast, Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents are about twice as likely to express anger toward the federal government than they were a year ago (11% then, 24% today). The only time during the Obama administration that levels of Democratic anger were about as high as they are now was in October 2013, during the federal government shutdown, when 25% said they were angry. Democratic anger at government was at similar levels during Bush's second term.

No partisan gap in anger at government

% saying anger best describes their feelings toward the federal government...



Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Confidence in the future of the U.S. moves lower

The public's overall outlook for the nation remains more optimistic than pessimistic, though a smaller share express confidence in the country's future than did so in the fall of 2015.

Overall, 41% say they have quite a lot of confidence in the future of the U.S., while another 30% say they have some confidence. About three-in-ten (28%) say they have very little or no confidence at all in the future of the U.S.

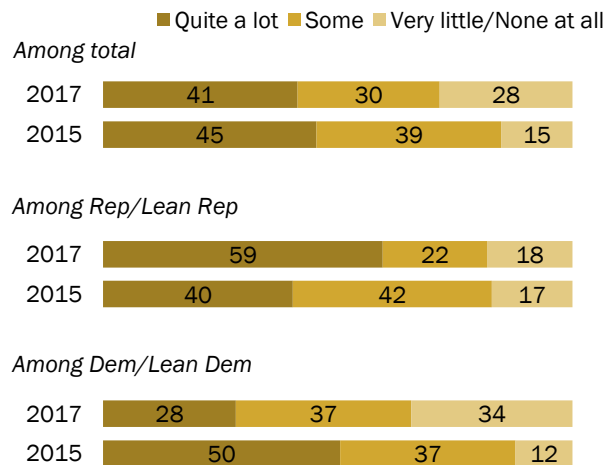
The share with at least some confidence in the future of the country is down 13 percentage points from 2015 (from 84% to 71%). Over the same period of time, the share saying they have very little or no confidence in the country's future has increased from 15% to 28%.

As with views of government, attitudes among Republicans and Democrats have moved in opposite directions following the election of Donald Trump. Fully 59% of Republicans and Republican leaners now say they have quite a lot of confidence in the country's future and 22% say they have some confidence; just 18% say they have little or none. The share with a lot of confidence in the country's future is up 19 points from 2015, when about as many Republicans said they had a lot (40%) as some (42%) confidence in the country's future.

Democrats express much less confidence in the future of the country today than in 2015. Currently, just 28% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say they have quite a lot of confidence in the country's future, down from 50% in 2015. And while 34% of Democrats now say they have little or no confidence in the nation's future; just 12% said this a year and a half ago.

Republicans now more confident than Democrats about country's future

Confidence in the future of the U.S. (%)



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Differences in views of the country's future vary across demographic groups. Men are almost twice as likely as women to have a lot of confidence in the future of the U.S. today (53% vs. 29%). This 24-point gender gap is far wider than it was in 2015, when there was little difference in views between men and women on this question.

Younger adults are less optimistic about the nation's future than older Americans. Nearly half of those 50 and older (48%) express a lot of confidence in the future of the nation, while only about a third of adults under 50 (35%) say the same.

Currently, there are modest differences in outlook by levels of educational attainment. Those with some college experience are somewhat less likely to say they have a lot of confidence in the future of the U.S. than are both those with more and less education. The shares who say they have a lot of confidence are down significantly since 2015 among postgraduates (13 points), college graduates (8 points) and those with some college experience (7 points). There has been no significant shift in outlook among those with no more than a high school diploma.

Growing gender gap in optimism about the country's future

% saying they have quite a lot of confidence in the future of the U.S.

	October 2015	April 2017	Change
Total	45	41	-4
Men	47	53	+6
Women	43	29	-14
18-29	38	30	-8
30-49	43	39	-4
50-64	49	49	0
65+	53	47	-6
Postgrad	55	42	-13
College grad	51	43	-8
Some college	41	34	-7
HS or less	43	45	+2

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Satisfaction with the state of the nation

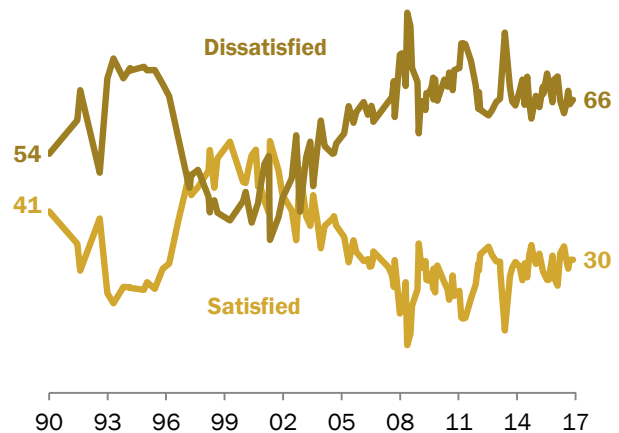
By 66% to 30% more Americans say they are dissatisfied than satisfied with the way things are going in the country today.

Overall satisfaction with the state of the nation has changed little over the last several years, but there has been a stark shift in these views among partisans.

Currently about half of Republicans (49%) say they are satisfied with the state of the nation. Though this is unchanged since February, it is up from 24% in January and 11% in late October, a few weeks before the 2016 election. Throughout the course of Barack Obama's presidency, no more than about two-in-ten Republicans expressed satisfaction with the way things were going in the country.

Continuing dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country today

% saying they are ___ with the way things are going in this country today...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

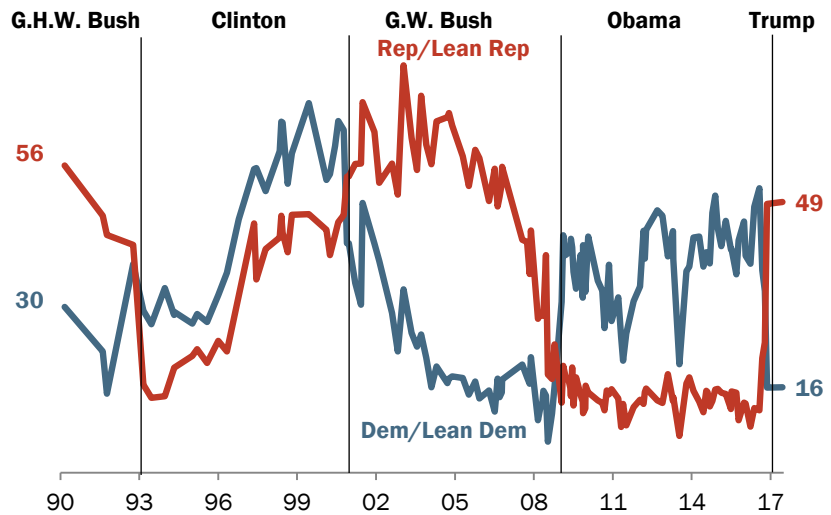
By contrast, Democrats' satisfaction with the country has plummeted following the election: Just 16% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say they are satisfied with the way things are going today. This is down from 33% in January and 52% in October.

While it is typical for partisan views of the country's direction to shift following a change in party control of the presidency, the size of the shift among both Democrats and Republicans is more pronounced today than it was in either 2001 (when GOP

views grew more positive and Democratic views more negative after the transition from Clinton to Bush) or in 2008 (when Democratic views became more positive and Republican views more negative at the beginning of the Obama administration).

Partisans' satisfaction with the state of the nation shifts sharply after Trump's election

% saying they are satisfied with the way things are going in this country today...



Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Research team

Carroll Doherty, *Director, Political Research*

Jocelyn Kiley, *Associate Director, Political Research*

Alec Tyson, *Senior Researcher*

Bradley Jones, *Research Associate*

Baxter Oliphant, *Research Associate*

Rob Suls, *Research Associate*

Hannah Fingerhut, *Research Assistant*

Shiva Maniam, *Research Assistant*

Samantha Smith, *Research Assistant*

Communications and editorial

Bridget Johnson, *Communications Associate*

Graphic design and web publishing

Peter Bell, *Information Graphics Designer*

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted April 5-11, 2017 among a national sample of 1,501 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (375 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,126 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 693 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2015 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted Apr. 5-11, 2017

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,501	2.9 percentage points
Form 1	746	4.1 percentage points
Form 2	755	4.1 percentage points
Republican/Lean Rep (F1/F2)	630 (326/304)	4.5 (6.2/6.5) percentage points
Democrat/Lean Dem (F1/F2)	771 (369/402)	4.1 (5.9/5.6) percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

Pew Research Center is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization and a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
APRIL 2017 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
APRIL 5-11, 2017
N=1,501**

QUESTIONS 1-3 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**NO QUESTIONS 4-10****ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=746]:**

Q.11F1 How much confidence do you have in the future of the United States **[READ IN ORDER]**?

	Quite <u>a lot</u>	Some	Very <u>little</u>	None <u>at all</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
Apr 5-11, 2017	41	30	20	8	1
Sep 16-Oct 4, 2015	45	39	12	3	1
PSRA/Newsweek: August, 1994	48	33	15	3	1
Gallup: May, 1991	59	34	5	1	1
Gallup: March, 1976 ¹	57	30	9	1	2
Gallup: August, 1975	60	23	13	3	2
Gallup: August, 1974	64	24	8	2	2
Gallup: April, 1974	68	19	10	2	1

ASK ALL:

Q.12 Some people say they are basically content with the federal government, others say they are frustrated, and others say they are angry. Which of these best describes how you feel?

	Basically <u>content</u>	Frustrated	Angry	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
Apr 5-11, 2017	19	55	22	3
Mar 17-26, 2016	20	57	21	2
Aug 27-Oct 4, 2015	18	57	22	3
Feb 12-26, 2014	17	62	19	2
Oct 9-13, 2013	12	55	30	3
Sep 25-29, 2013	17	51	26	5
Jan 9-13, 2013	20	58	19	3
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	17	58	21	3
Aug 17-21, 2011	11	60	26	3
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	22	59	14	5
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	21	52	23	4
Apr 1-5, 2010	23	52	21	4
Mar 11-21, 2010	19	56	21	5
Early January, 2007	21	58	16	5
Early October, 2006	21	54	20	5
March, 2004	32	52	13	3
Mid November, 2001	53	34	8	5
June, 2000	28	53	13	6
February, 2000	33	54	10	3
October, 1997	29	56	12	3

¹ Gallup June 1986 poll not included in trend due to differences in question context.

ASK ALL:

Q.13 How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?
Just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

	Just about <u>always</u>	Most of <u>the time</u>	Only some <u>of the time</u>	(VOL.) <u>Never</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
Apr 5-11, 2017	4	16	68	11	2
Aug 27- Oct 4, 2015	3	16	67	13	1
Feb 12-26, 2014	3	21	68	7	1
Oct 9-13, 2013	3	16	68	12	1
Jan 9-13, 2013	3	23	67	6	2
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	3	17	72	7	2
Aug 17-21, 2011	3	16	72	8	1
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	4	25	65	4	2
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	3	21	65	10	1
Apr 1-5, 2010	5	20	61	13	1
Mar 11-21, 2010	3	19	65	11	2
January, 2007	3	28	63	5	1
February, 2006	4	30	59	6	1
Mid-September, 2005	3	28	63	4	2
Mid-March, 2004	4	32	59	4	1
February, 2000	5	35	56	3	1
May, 1999	3	28	62	5	2
February, 1999	4	27	64	4	1
November, 1998 ²	4	22	61	11	2
February, 1998	5	29	61	4	1
October, 1997	3	36	59	2	*

NO QUESTIONS 14-18, 22-24, 27-29, 33-35, 38-40, 44-45, 51-54, 58-60, 64, 68-69, 73-79, 85-91, 93-94

QUESTIONS 19-20, 25-26, 30-32, 36, 41-43, 55-57, 61-63, 65-67, 70-72, 81-84, 95-96 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

QUESTIONS 21, 37, 46-50, 80, 92 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) <u>No</u> <u>preference</u>	(VOL.) <u>Other</u> <u>party</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>	<u>Lean</u> <u>Rep</u>	<u>Lean</u> <u>Dem</u>
Apr 5-11, 2017	24	31	42	2	1	*	17	20
Feb 7-12, 2017	23	34	37	3	1	2	15	18
Jan 4-9, 2017	25	28	41	4	*	1	18	19
Nov 30-Dec 5, 2016	24	33	35	5	1	3	15	16
Oct 20-25, 2016	26	33	36	3	*	2	15	17
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	27	32	33	5	*	3	11	16
Aug 9-16, 2016	27	32	35	2	1	2	13	16
Jun 15-26, 2016	24	33	37	4	1	2	16	16
Apr 12-19, 2016	25	32	37	3	1	2	16	17
Yearly Totals								
2016	25.4	32.0	36.5	3.4	.5	2.2	14.6	17.0
2015	23.7	30.4	40.1	3.6	.4	1.8	16.4	17.3

² The November, 1998 survey was conducted Oct. 26-Dec. 1, 1998. The question asked, "How much of the time do you trust the government in Washington to do the right thing? Just about always, most the time, or only some of the time?"

PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<u>No preference</u>	<u>Other party</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>
2014	23.2	31.5	39.5	3.1	.7	2.0	16.2	16.5
2013	23.9	32.1	38.3	2.9	.5	2.2	16.0	16.0
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

NO QUESTIONS 97, 99**QUESTION 98 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**